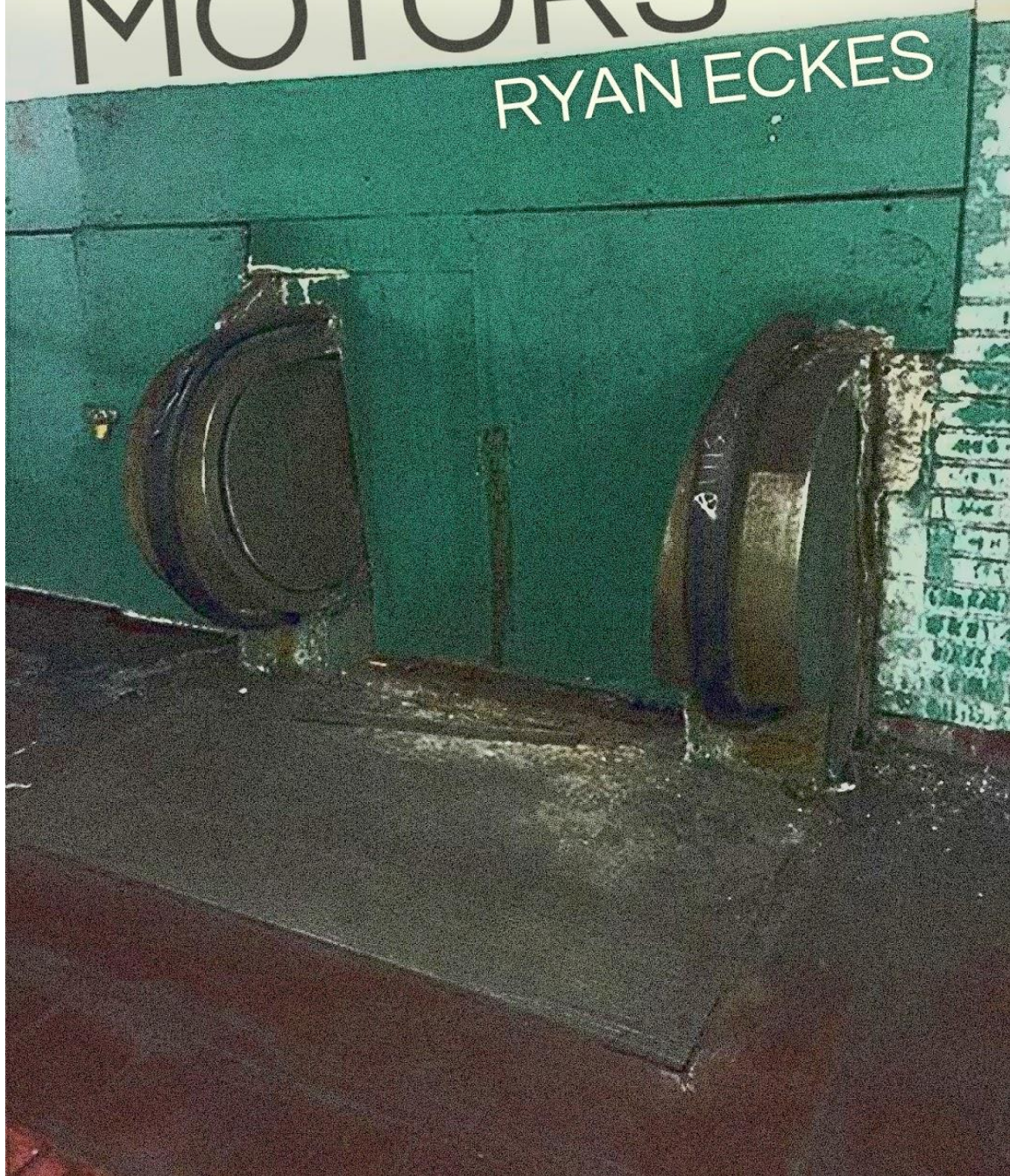


# GENERAL MOTORS

RYAN ECKES



# **GENERAL MOTORS**

by Ryan Eckes

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## **I chase scenes**

we're in a classroom, which is a store. the professor tells us the true writer must destroy his own ego. do not tell stories, he says, unless they are someone else's. do not say i. i look at the clock and the clock's the wind. it says one tongue per king, and that pulls on me like a sad movie. i just watched five easy pieces, what a bummer. what a bummer he left her and life up in the air like a dead piano. i'm sick of the road as the end as if no gas station rots forever round the bend. one tongue per king, the poem becomes its own thing. not america, not this professor pulling maps down over the board, pretending to stand outside. he's the enemy, which is at least tens of thousands of people. i'm not looking for the enemy. we look at each other and pass notes. call on me, call on me. let's see what happens.

we're in mcglinchey's dancing to the juke box, iggy pop. *no dancing*,  
says bartender, but we keep dancing, the waitress comes over, *for*  
*real stop dancing or you gotta leave*. it's the law somehow, but we're  
drunk and we want you, come dance w/ us, please—please be the girl  
we used to love way way back, she won't crack the slightest smile. i  
don't know who i'm even talking to. is this a poem? a poetry reading?  
she drags my dead horse across the bar and says *look, who wants this*  
*joke. you think it's my job to listen to you, it's not—it's to serve you*  
*hot dogs while you drink yourself back to the womb—which is what—*  
*you don't know, and that's your job—to find out. i am not the passenger.*  
*i do not ride and ride and ride.*

we're in the steamfitters hall peeling walmart stickers off hundreds of copies of the mark of athena. athena will be free, and kids will love her, and kids will leave her for the sea of monsters, and the sea of monsters 2. *you can't get away from blue*, a little girl tells me. then here we are—blue—blue rolls the street thru as each april will. to mess you up a little. a little april pointed at the wrong people. over production. over the rainbow, the luxury of committing to nothing. blue peels off. liberty motel, liberty gas. liberty thru and thru.

what's wiseblood? all the cleverness, all the being-outside-of. wawa  
goose flies thru it and the vulture brains fall away. i am a person of  
septa, laugh at me. everybody knows captain moneybags was hired  
to dj the conversation, that's fine: half-assed foreplay and the great  
depression. knife on the roof, been there seven years. blood to rust.  
so what should the maximum wage be? cockroach the size of an  
alligator just slid under my radiator.



we're in a chik-fil-a spiking the sweet tea w/ birth control.  
the deep state of cumming hard spreads an all caps hush of  
southern hospitality. finally i get it. we can barely contain  
ourselves. hell dies, who wants coffee? all day the drip in  
my step elects the ground i walk on—a joke you can bite  
like a peach. see the coins we trust in—those are gods  
passed out on the bathroom floor.

we're in applebee's, and you have a gun. okay. high art lives, the stomach is greased. am i talking too matter-of-factly about suicide? there's a reason wal-marts and pet-smarts keep popping up all over: it's hero time, still. your daughter's getting sleepy, the bus boy wants to take her home. watch out—he don't pay taxes, never will. look at him, shredding our right to work. what if we didn't have a right to work. sure i'll read your broke-ass poem for the fourth time. let's let this place be paradise before the next round of fires. take off all your clothes, and put your hands on my head.

we're in a greyhound station in baltimore w/ an hour to kill, staring at the tv. cnn is in love w/ the bombing of the boston marathon, and cnn is in love w/ 165,000 new jobs, 165,000 new jobs, 165,000 new jobs. they zoom in to their analyst who's been staring at the mayor's face. i can see the mayor's tears, he says, the mayor means it. he'll make a wonderful ronald reagan some day, just as the last four presidents, just as the president today who picks up your phone— anybody there? anybody says "my dumb life" but in the station and on the bus nothing rings and nobody means a thing, so we're a tribe. it's communism, calm as a yawn til the next city, where we'll be sucked out and dispersed by vacuums of identity. finally we board. the man next to me asks if i can watch his bag. sure i can.

we're in toon town. gag orders pause a judge up the creek like  
a FREE sign taped to garbage. your life is whose? the trees sneeze  
and cough, we're all dirty water, minor poets. it's a certain kind  
of person expects to be cleaned up after—everybody, anybody  
lurching for the jackpot. i hit it, jessica rabbits hop all over me,  
make one great jessica rabbit. in her mouth all weeks leak out  
thighs for sleep, no wait. rent paid then monday heaves, shucks  
hi and this malaise you'll forget—now, which could be anything—  
*amargi*, sumerian word for freedom, *return to mother*, literally.  
you die, love, whatever, still my friends are buildings. they fight  
off despair all the time, all the time. in their bricks heat of sadness  
of capitalism, god! fuck it—to *the beaches*, *the look of beaches*  
*in our faces*, okay—zero killed—*oceans, oceans, oceans—down*  
*to earth, earth, earth—*

why does your milkman whistle in the morning? because church  
is a puddle we piss in together—no debts. no drinkus interruptus.  
LA's gone under, thank god, before new orleans. a toast to the ice  
on our tail—chase it til hard work melts the carousel of progress  
and we'll swap spits like grandparents atop new year, stop being  
the thing we were thought into. 11:59 pops into 12:00, looks fake  
but isn't. as if you were ever a citizen of anything. be proud of  
your friends and the luck between you—call it a country, even, til  
you gag on it—because you are a fool, and fools go on.

we're sitting in sallie mae's driveway in delaware, arms locked singing songs to cops in stupid hats. they won't let us in the shareholders' meeting because we're not rich and we don't believe in fucking people over. our heads are getting burned up in the sun but we keep singing to the cops and to ourselves. then all at once the hundred of us blow our little red whistles that say SLAP, deafening everything—excruciating, it's excruciating, the cops are cursing at us, *oh shit! i would give you a trillion dollars to make it stop. i would give you five million lamborghinis, 15,000 private jets, 140 private islands and every team in baseball one trillion times. i would give you one trillion decades of war in a country you'll never have to see. sallie mae, i would feed you the corpse of your mother, inch by fucking inch.*

we're in jingo pipeline heaven, and you are a cloud, so get in  
the car. there is no "becoming." the poets, handcuffed, police  
each other's authenticity. their world shrinks to a nugget.  
bukowski's tombstone: don't try. nickels and dimes, the wheels  
on the bus, which is us. when you say "who you are," the sources  
hurt, the irony fails. if a word's a flag, just stick it in the ground,  
walk out the cemetery. don't stick it on your car. your car will  
be towed. it will be towed by a christian single. what is a  
christian single?

we're on record, skipping around in the washington post amazon buys. the store greeter hawks a poetics. what is love? the answer: heavy possibility, the sag of the feeling of a time you miss, the balls full of cum—the *the-the-the*, that's all. in other words, monopoly. the year we did not see each other's faces. in other words, wrong question. that shit is adjunct, hole of the essential. like a septa we sunk our life into. that tease of the page-to-page life. listen, where we left off i was saying don't play basketball when i'm talking about heraclitus. but you play basketball. and i talk about heraclitus. we dribble in the same river twice. the river is broke and the blackbird is flying. the adjunct, my friend, is blowing in the wind.



we're up 18-0, too bad it doesn't count. i'm there in spirit, says  
someone clinging to nothing, muted field mown brown to the  
dead who swim underground. every passing stranger hooks to  
every passing stranger—anger, the sea. history of some “pure  
present” we can wave to in the window. both arms are acceptable.  
the history of how to swim begins with drowning. our mannequin  
comes up for breath, it's monday. we chase fragments. we will  
never kill all of these fascists. we are a they, looted, so go ahead  
and cheers with your water. that's the heart holding out. *that's  
some pete rosey shit*, you say. you whisper, without a contract,  
*i have no bosses in this room*. the room is hunger. we swallow.

we're surviving, so there's a show. some lines i grow jealous of. bills flow thru my body, wet day dreams. you can have that line. make it stroll out the mouth of a fish. see something, say something. i wasn't expecting to be moved by the zombies, but i was. the vast pastures of irrelevance. the pervasive motorization of petty individualisms. their detours of pleasure scribbled in hurry—those streets await our faith. we can have them. like the birds. birds are pervs. pervasive motorization, one tweets. one squawks. one fucks.

we're doing unpaid work in the courtroom while temple university's lawyer attacks us for being poor. his tongue is a wet dollar. *you have no power*, he says, *it says so right here in this poem you didn't write. therefore, you should have no power—you can just go home*. but we just sit there and we can't be fired for just sitting there, for being a poet, for being a union. for being an army of lovers. the lawyer's tongue is then a wet piece of toilet paper. part of it tears off and falls to the floor. pick it up, says the judge. the lawyer picks up his tongue and hands it to the provost, who puts it in his own mouth and begins to chew. wet shit runs down his chin, dribbles onto his tie. the judge orders a five-minute break. outside the provost tries to shake my hand, so i hand him a fish, which he begins smacking on the pavement, smacking the fish on the pavement over and over and he begins to choke, choking on the poem we didn't write. and we stand there and watch the provost choke and choke and then, finally, die. then, on his forehead, we write a big fucking F.

we're a hammer in the radiator, naming every instant of collective joy—in person, in person, to make the platform each nothing and pulsing, a sea of exes on a ship of toothpicks so the music's a question to match all the preaching. passenger pigeon to joe jerk-off: can we just be people. then a quick row of faces—nope, nope, nope, nope it's just fall, a hole in the iris like a ten-cent cloud of witness, and what evidence. transpass, leaf under shoe, wawa gift card, a "moderate" who tells us to "keep working on that message." *let's dump out his coffee! dump that motherfucker already—yes him to death, yes him to death!*

we're in old city unsnapping the horses' shitbags. freedom is free,  
the street buckles like empties. the tourists, white, turn red as gum—  
it behooves them. corona pony for you, corona pony for me—cheers  
to brick wall, full dues paid against which i smash myself into our  
empties—openness, then, salt on the lips. whims of higher ups just  
pissed into cups, beer pong for the board of trustees who buck like  
starved asses in a jar of nothing. in a jar of fake history. it rolls down  
the street, halts at a fence of paul revere droppings. *shhh, shhh!*  
let the sewer speak.

i don't know anything about horses. pet the bus w/ your breath.  
window, go, it's me. runs like new. what does love want from me.  
before standard time a horse beat a train called tom thumb in  
a race, 1830. train broke down under moon, horse had no name—  
that's time. old pain, moon, round and round. the horse's eyes  
roll back, run away. my mother's last name is west, it's empty.  
she escaped it, laboring for everyone after her father lost his job  
at quaker rubber, drank himself to nothing. we could reinvent the  
whole disaster. my car is parked outside. i was born on february  
42<sup>nd</sup>. i sat way in the back of the horse's mouth for twelve years  
w/ my heart on fire. the future means no. the rest is history i will  
rip apart w/ you.

we're driving down washington ave, listening to "wonderful tonight."  
do i feel all right? i feel the dumpy heat, red light every fifty feet. sad  
horns from the corners dismember the clapton, cluck-u-chicken. cluck-  
u-seven eleven. cluck-u-a-plus mini mart. i remember, right around here,  
losing my breath once from heartbreak, out of nowhere, just walking  
along here, at night. frozen music. architecture is frozen music. people  
were drinking in the scoreboard, which is closed. we closed it, remember,  
to drink inside and watch people kiss and turn off the lights and be  
washington ave.

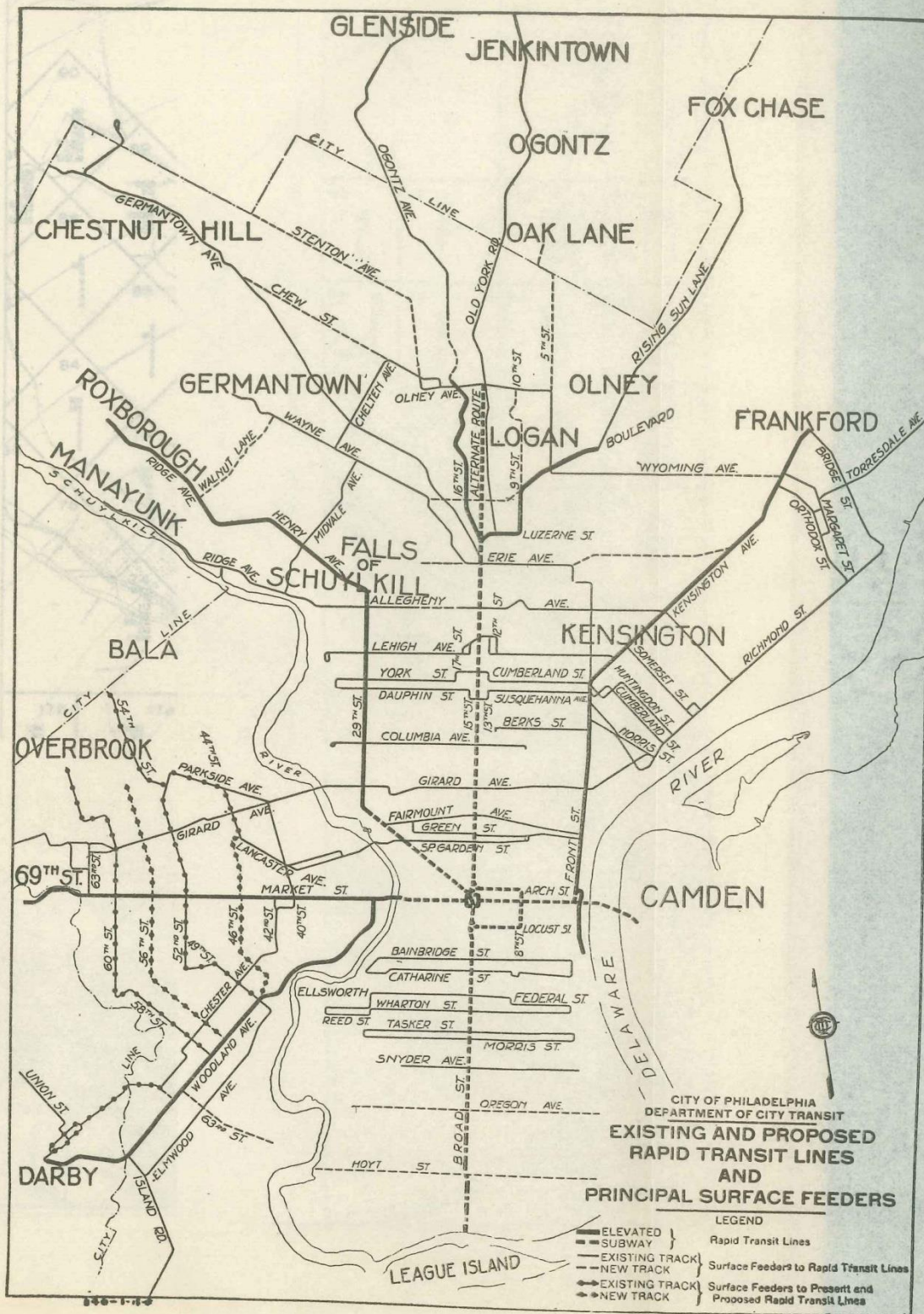
good luck in all your future endeavors, types the middle manager  
chewing on a slim jim. back at home we're rinsing off the isms. it's  
the wknd, and the middle class are out volunteering for the one  
percent. we grow free w/out them, though they keep calling. feel  
them push monday into sunday, friday into saturday. one percent  
of one smidgen of a dead cockroach's heart casts its vote, finally,  
for the middle class. can freedom be a pigeon? if it kicks you the  
right way. if it spits on your shoe and laughs in your face. if in your  
neighbor's face you look long enough to lose your mask, and you  
feel it fly away, feel it shit on a boss—any boss—then yes.



we're playing chess on the unfinished concourse to nowhere. you take off your gas mask and look at me. a train slides under us, the heart flutters, the homeless who sleep in waves around us. are we homeless, you say, the city unriden in your face, the lines unbuilt. you want to organize the ocean. unwrap the fish, i say. you unwrap the fish, and the fish squints. we begin where we are. the king is dead, and the queen is dead, and the night is fat with pawns.

**II    spurs**

In 1912, Philadelphia's transit commissioner, A. Merritt Taylor, proposed a comprehensive subway plan to serve the transit needs of the entire city of Philadelphia. Only two of the proposed subway lines were ever completed: the Market-Frankford line (1922) and the Broad Street line (1938; extended slightly in 1956 & 1973). Plans for other lines were revised/revived over the years but ultimately abandoned.



MAP NO. 90

## Passyunk spur

There was a plan for a Passyunk spur off the Broad Street line in South Philly. It would run southwest under Passyunk Ave, all the way out, maybe, to Tinicum, the wildlife preserve at the edge of the city, home to freshwater tidal marsh, migratory birds, ducks, deer, fish, foxes and other small animals.

Before the wildlife was “preserved”, of course, all of South Philly was wild. *Weccacoe*, it was called by the Lenape. That’s supposed to mean “peaceful place.”

But this English word, “peace”, derives from the Latin *pax*, which means binding together (fastening) by treaty or agreement, as in *pact*. So “peace”, rooted in some idea of boundary and nation, unties my faith in the translation.

The past remains wild.

I hear the word “wild” in Stevie Nicks’ voice.

*Don’t blame it on me  
Blame it on my wild heart*  
she sings to me

Whose heart is not a wild heart, I wonder. And if you are not your heart, then what are you?

And who, afraid of violence, does not become violent?

I try to raise my hand. It trembles from the violence my body’s absorbed, the violence in my blood, the violence in my memory.

*Everybody’s got a hungry heart*  
Bruce Springsteen sings  
to everybody  
in the stadium  
at the end of  
the line  
it means nothing

An artist I know who made my own heart grow wilder told me once in a bar that her favorite love song is “Tougher than the Rest” by Bruce Springsteen, from his album *Tunnel of Love*.

Soon after, I stumbled on a *Tunnel of Love* cassette tape in a used record store. I played it in my car every day, to and from work, for several months, until it hurt too much. I replaced it with The Supremes’ *Right On* and played it every day, to and from work, until it hurt too much.

This isn’t about what could have been, but the past bores a hole in my heart, and I write into it, as if entering a tunnel.

The juke box plays, and people try to say what it means in the background.

I don't know all that I know. I know lovers sometimes need restraining orders. I know the difference between *inhibit* and *inhabit* is very slim. Both derive from the Latin *habēre*—to hold, possess, have, handle.

There is no place like home.

When I hear *Weccacoe* I think first of Weccacoe Avenue, home to the Philadelphia Parking Authority at the bottom of the city, where they tow your car. It's hard to get to if you don't have a ride. It's hard to get your car back. Why should we give it back to you, you piece of shit. You fucking animal.

OCF Realty recently advertised a new condo called "Weccacoe Flats." Like the parking authority, OCF is expert at fucking over the poor. They're responsible for much of South Philly's gentrification, especially in the black neighborhood Point Breeze.

There's a corner store called Wicacco on 4<sup>th</sup> St. in Queen Village. I've occasionally stopped there for a bottle of water on my way to South St.

Around the corner from the corner store is Weccacoe Playground. Under the playground is the Bethel Burying Ground, where 5,000 African Americans were laid to rest during the first half of the nineteenth century by the Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The church remains as the oldest Black-owned church in the country, though the neighborhood was gentrified long ago.

The word "cemetery" derives from the Indo-European root *kei-*, which means *bed, couch* and also *beloved, dear*. The words *city, civic, civil, cite, incite, excite* and *resuscitate* derive from this same root.

Every word is a spur, an outgrowth, a departure. Language, like the city, is wild, even while it inhibits our freedom, our ability to make peace.

I think *Weccacoe* now means this: to make poor, or to systematically fuck the poor.

There is no peace.

Passyunk Avenue was once a footpath, I learned from Kevin Varrone's book *Passyunk Lost*. I got lost in it. In my own neighborhood. Which I do not possess. Which no one does but the dead.

I know I can't leave. I want to go inside this city I was born into, but I want somewhere other than cemetery.

A spur is the track of an animal. I try to follow.

Right now we're heading into winter. I would like to speed thru it. I would like to be able to get out of bed in the morning and just do my job.

I want you. I want you. I want you, peaceful place.

## Germantown spur

There was a plan for a Germantown spur off the Broad Street line that would take off from Erie Station in North Philly and run northwest under Germantown Ave. Germantown was once German Township, two words, a distant suburb where textile mills lined Wissahickon Creek. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was pulled into Philly by the railroad as the city pushed outward as if trying to escape itself.

Germantown is many histories of escape, of refuge and flight. There was a station on the Underground Railroad in the 1850s, right on Germantown Ave, known as the Johnson House. It still stands, now a museum.

Museum means “shrine of the muses,” an attempt at making a house of mind, a station for thinking. So it can’t work the way you want it to. Muses move, pass through. A station wants you to stay, to stand like a steed in a stable.

“A museum is a curious graveyard of *thinking*,” wrote Amiri Baraka in his essay “Hunting is not those heads on the wall.”

In the 1790s, George Washington whose head is on the quarter and one-dollar bill escaped Philly’s yellow fever epidemic by hiding in Germantown, along with other rich people, 6 miles away from the city. Horses and boats took them there. Horses were status symbols.

Imagine the man on the one-dollar bill petting his favorite horse. *This one’s my favorite*, he says. Imagine him, with that one-dollar expression, naming his horse. *This is Mary Ball*, he says, *I love her*. Imagine the man on the one-dollar bill talking to his horse. *It’s all right, baby, we’re almost there*.

Money turns you into a cartoon, a rubber band that can be shot across the room, bounced into other forms. Time does this too. So does speed and the desire for speed—that you must *be* traffic to escape traffic. No one thinks of themselves as traffic, even while they’re *in* traffic.

As traffic, you’re part of your vehicle and part of everyone else’s. As you speed up, you embody the freedom you desire, escape itself, the pleasure of animation, wind blowing in your face, and you become more elastic, more fluid, like Tom or Jerry, like the Road Runner, like Wile E. Coyote, and you begin to feel more and more invincible. You fly on I-95 as pure spirit until traffic slows, and then slows, and then comes to a standstill, and you want to pull your hair out, because you’re a cartoon just like everyone else, in your private car, melting into the public roads, which will never be yours.

Fuck you and the horse you rode in on.

Fuck me and the Ford Focus I broke down in.

*We gotta get out of this place / If it’s the last thing we ever do / We gotta get out of this place / Girl, there’s a better life for me and you*

That’s the Animals, 1965. Bruce Springsteen, “The Boss,” has said, “That’s every song I’ve ever written. That’s all of them. I’m not kidding, either. That’s ‘Born to Run’, ‘Born in the USA’.”

It's a song born of working-class frustration. It's not a song about overthrowing capitalism but of escaping it. It's a song you turn up in traffic, where solidarity is impossible. You are stuck in the hellish city. Stuck in your job. Stuck in your body, slaving away just like your mother and father, just like your neighbor. Nothing but traffic. Animals in need of animation.

The words "animal" and "animation" share the word "anima," which means "soul." The Indo-European root, *ana*, means "to breathe."

In the film noir *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), humans and cartoons co-exist. It's the 1940s, and in contrast to the humans, cartoons are playful, imaginative beings—artists—who live more or less peacefully with one another in a completely animated part of Los Angeles called Toontown. They are also immortal unless erased by a special "dip." All of Toontown is under threat of erasure because of a plot to build a freeway through it. To make it happen, Judge Doom has purchased LA's public streetcar system in order to destroy it.

Judge Doom's dream is our reality: "I see a place where people get on and off the freeway. On and off. All day, all night. Soon where Toontown once stood will be a string of gas stations, inexpensive motels, restaurants that serve rapidly-prepared food, tire salons, automobile dealerships, and wonderful, wonderful billboards reaching as far as the eye can see. My God, it'll be beautiful."

Fortunately, the good guys win. The human protagonist, detective Eddie Valiant, saves the animated protagonist, Roger Rabbit, and in doing so he helps save Toontown. He also regains his lost sense of humor and breaks his own depression. He gives Roger a big funny kiss and all the toons cheer as they've won collective ownership of Toontown. In the end, Valiant finds his *anima*. The movie, ultimately, is about fending off spiritual death. Implicit is a critique of Jim Crow-era racism—toons, who are drawings of animals, including people, are discriminated against, seen as *less than human*, and are segregated from humans, who believe they themselves are *not-animals*.

In real life, Judge Doom was General Motors, which along with Standard Oil, Firestone Tires, Mack, and Philips Petroleum, conspired to dismantle streetcar systems across the USA in the 1930s and 40s. They succeeded by using a front company called National City Lines. I learned this on 11<sup>th</sup> St. one day waiting for the 23 bus, which takes you to Germantown. The bus was late and the man next to me, who was complaining about SEPTA, started musing about the long-gone wonderful days of streetcars, how they ran up every street before we had buses. He told me to look up National City Lines. I did.

A hundred years ago, Philly had 550 miles of track and a fleet of 2,000 trolleys. Then came the rise of the car, which is an eraser. Then came the Great Depression. Then National City Lines: most trolley routes were converted to buses. And subway development slowed. Then came World War 2 and highways and suburbs, blockbusting and white flight.

In real life, Eddie Valiant and Roger Rabbit were people who drove cars, listening to Bruce Springsteen songs before Bruce Springsteen was born.

There were people in Germantown like Samuel West, my great-grandfather who made a living at the BUDD factory, which manufactured train and car bodies. His father, Thomas West, had drunk himself to death after the Great Depression sunk his textile mill and lightning killed his eldest son on the roof of their house. The rest of the family fought over the scraps and Samuel wanted nothing to do with it. He



eloped with a poor girl from Scranton, moved to another neighborhood. He never talked to his siblings again.

For Samuel, love was an escape. His granddaughter, Dorothy, is my mother. She says Samuel loved his new family but was close-minded and racist. He told her once, whichever political party is in power, join that party—that way, you know someone's got your back when things get bad. To him, all politicians were crooks. Their ideas didn't matter. What mattered was self-preservation.

Having escaped, Samuel found himself preserved, happy with where he was, sitting on his small piece of land in North Philly, believing perhaps that he was his own boss, pretending perhaps not to be erasing anything. But the world began to swirl around him again, and he started to feel that he couldn't move, that he was stuck as if he were in a museum and people were looking in but could not see him. And he began to panic.

**Center City loop**

-Looks like we just missed one.

-Yep. Miss it every night.

## Northeast spur

There was a plan for a Northeast spur off the Broad Street line that would take off from Erie Avenue and run under Roosevelt Boulevard to the end of the city. In 1912, when a citywide subway system was originally proposed, Bustleton, where I grew up, was still farmland and the Boulevard was still being built. The Boulevard would become part of the Lincoln Highway, also conceived of in 1912, a transcontinental highway running from Times Square in NYC to Lincoln Park in San Francisco, warping time and place.

When I was a kid, the Boulevard seemed to go on forever. In my recurring dream the Boulevard took us to the end of the world. There was a grayish-pink sky where cars dropped off the edge of the world like a waterfall. What I remember of the dream's feeling is fear that my father had taken us too far as we struggled to turn around against the tide of traffic.

My father started working for SEPTA when he was 19. "I can't keep doing this, this bullshit," he would say to himself again and again over the years. He always intended to quit, find something better. He used to say, "A monkey could do my job." He took the Boulevard to work every day. He never quit.

SEPTA's slogan for decades has been "WE'RE GETTING THERE."

Plans for a Boulevard subway were revived in the 1960s, and Sears dug a tunnel for a station at Adams Avenue, where their catalog warehouse and a shopping center were located. But the city was denied federal funds and the project was abandoned.

Peggy West, my grandmother, remembers when the subway tunnel was being dug. She lived in Tacony, a neighborhood close by, along the river. Peggy loved public transportation. She was a country girl who fell in love with the city after falling in love with Chauncey West in the Navy.

Peggy was planning to go to Paris before Chauncey proposed to her. She was surprised—had figured she was already too old to get married—because she was 20. A far cry from Nebraska, Philadelphia seemed as good a future as any. "If I had gone to Paris," she told me, "you wouldn't be here."

In Chauncey's family, the dinner talk was a mix of worry, excitement and relief, propelled by continuous job insecurity—"did we get this contract, did we get that contract—they were neat but not happy stories," said Peggy.

The thing to do, Chauncey believed, having dropped out of high school and left the Navy, was to fall in love and move your family from North Philadelphia to Northeast Philadelphia—which is what hordes of white people were doing in the 1950s as more black people moved to the city.

Chauncey landed a union job with the Quaker Rubber company, which manufactured all kinds of hoses and things like escalator handrails for companies like Otis. And he got a house in Tacony, just north of the factory. He and Peggy raised their four daughters there. The eldest was Dorothy, my mother.

People in Tacony and Wissinoming were soon called "river rats" by people in Mayfair and neighborhoods developing farther north along the Boulevard. These white people, including the Italian and German immigrants of my father's family, took pride in having more income and a slightly larger patch of grass in front of their slightly larger house that was closer to a slightly nicer school and slightly

more homogenous shopping center in a slightly more homogenous neighborhood that was slightly more distant from North Philly, where black people lived. They were more American, they thought, meaning better than everyone who lived south of them, while at the same time they worried that their own neighborhood was “changing” and would talk to each other quietly about moving to the next neighborhood north—“for the kids.”

And so these white people were constantly abandoning what they said they believed in, which was their own superiority for having achieved middle-class status in their white skin in the country that had won World War II and created freedom for all—the freedom to fall in love and get a house with some grass in front of it and have kids you’ll support by working a job that helps make the whole system go, a system that tells you and your kids in school that hard work will make you a good person, that you will get there.

I’m no river rat, Chauncey thought. But H.K. Porter, the giant train-maker, bought the rubber company and laid everyone off. And then Chauncey couldn’t find a job, and he drank and drank and screamed at his daughters. Peggy went to work downtown as a secretary, typing a hundred words a minute. When she came home from work, Chauncey screamed at her, too. Dorothy took care of her younger sisters. Peggy and Chauncey divorced and a few years later, Chauncey died of aplastic anemia from exposure to chemicals in the factory.

Most people are horrified when they first encounter Roosevelt Boulevard, the spine of Northeast Philadelphia. It’s a total free-for-all, a violent expression of 20<sup>th</sup> century masculine self-abandonment. Named after Theodore, it consists of twelve lanes, six up, six down, divided by two grass medians, some lined with trees, which open periodically for you to cross over at any speed you like—you can yield, sure, but it’s not required. Your best bet, if the Boulevard is new to you, is to stay in a center lane so you can remain aware of drivers going 90 and 30 miles an hour. If you need to make a left turn, godspeed.

If you want to feel like the frog in Frogger, try crossing the Boulevard on foot. As a kid, I enjoyed the challenge. It’s how I got to Tower Records. It’s safer to jaywalk, using the medians to wait for cars to pass in either direction, rather than crossing at an intersection, where a car’s quick left turn could end your life. It has in fact ended many lives.

The second- and third-most dangerous intersections in the United States are on the Boulevard. I grew up around the corner from the latter, Grant Ave and the Boulevard. Sometimes I heard accidents, and sometimes I heard stories of poor old ladies flying through the air. Up and down the Boulevard, year-round, the medians are decorated with flowers and crosses.

To reduce the number of accidents, the Philadelphia Parking Authority started a “Red Light Camera Program” that issues \$100-tickets for blowing a red light. The program has resulted in huge profits for a private camera company in Arizona. It has not made the city safer.

The American solution to a public problem, created by private industry, is usually to find a new way to steal from the public. Robbing your neighbor, in other words, is an American tradition, and it thrives in Northeast Philly, where people live as if their neighbors do not really exist. Believing in the American dream is a way to deny your own existence.

Northeast residents actually saw themselves as so American that in the 1980s a state senator, Frank Salvatore, led a movement to secede the Northeast from Philadelphia. The Northeast was being robbed

by the city, he believed. Our taxes are too high, he argued, for the paltry services we receive—not enough police, not enough trash collection, not enough street cleaning, not enough public transit. He proposed a bill that would make the Northeast, which was half-Republican, its own township: “Liberty Township”. The dull, racist landscape would become all its own. The secessionist movement died, however, because it was unclear how Liberty Township would afford itself. The Northeast remains dependent on the rest of the city.

Not long before I moved out of the Northeast, I met the poet Gil Ott, who asked me about my life, what I wanted to do. He told me a story about getting lost once in the Northeast. “How does one get out of Northeast Philadelphia?” he asked. I said, “Do you mean if you’re in a car or bus, or do you mean like culturally?” “Both,” he said.

July 6, 2015

Dear Ryan,

I want you to have this badge. It was your Grandfather Chauncey's badge that he wore to work every day that he worked, for 30 years. He was such a strong supporter of the United Rubber Workers of America and felt his shop union protected his job and benefits. He was shop steward for several years and when he was scalded in the manufacturing process one time, the union supplemented his pay for the six weeks he was on crutches. Of course, he never received his pension because the plant was sold and the new owner (H.K. Porter) denied the pension plan. I had heard that the union took the case to court, but by that time I was out of the picture and never heard the outcome. I suppose I could look it up on line if I had any idea where to look. Anyway, I have heard that you're not big on collecting things, but thought just maybe you would want to throw this in a drawer where it will occasionally remind you that you had a grandfather who was a guy who was big on unions, and who would be so very proud to see you doing the union work you are doing today. I often wonder if he would have any useful advice to offer you.

Love,

Grammy



## Roxborough spur

There was a plan for a Roxborough spur that would parallel the Schuylkill River. It would run northwest from city hall under the Ben Franklin Parkway to the art museum, then up 29<sup>th</sup> Street, elevated, through North Philly, then along Henry Avenue out to Roxborough. The line would mirror the el—which exists—on the east side of the city, the extension of the Market-Frankford line that parallels the Delaware River, like an arm of the city.

To imagine a city truly of the people, I have to sense freedom in what's phantom. I imagine the Roxborough spur, for example, would have given the art museum two public arms. Would this have made the art museum more of a public space? And what would that mean?

Would it mean a place where people talk and make things together? Would it mean more nights like the Zoe Strauss opening, when there was a dance party, when the museum *was* Philly? Would it mean the museum would be free ("pay-what-you-want") more than one day a month? Would it mean everyone might have the means and time and interest to go there? Would it mean a completely different kind of museum from the ones we know?

At the end of Rocky V, after Rocky has taught his son how to fight, he says, "I've been running up these steps for twenty years and I never knew there were valuable pictures in this building."

Outside the museum, you can get your picture taken with a Rocky impersonator. Sometimes I see the impersonator out of character, as himself, walking around South Philly. I sat across from him on the subway once and two kids, maybe 15 years old, asked him for directions and they struck up small talk. "Where you headed?" they asked. "Work," he said. "What do you do?" "Oh, I'm a movie actor," he said. The kids just nodded. They didn't recognize him. He got off at city hall and then, presumably, made the 20-minute walk up the parkway to the art museum.

In New York City there's a man named Darius McCollum who's been impersonating transit employees for no money for over 30 years. He's been in and out of prison his entire adult life for criminal impersonation, without harming anyone. Obsessed with trains since he was a little kid, he knows how to operate and repair subways and buses and perform just about any MTA job. He has memorized the NYC subway map and schedules. He's even attended regular union meetings, sharing ideas for dealing with management and improving working conditions.

McCollum's obsession is blamed on Asperger syndrome, but the illnesses of our society have made his life impossible. He got picked on in school, and when he was 11 a classmate stabbed him in the back with scissors. He found refuge in the subway, befriending MTA employees who taught him how to operate the trains and used him happily as a source of free labor. McCollum, a black man, feels more at home in the subway than anywhere and knows more about the MTA than anyone. But the MTA refuses to offer him any type of job. They even refuse to let him volunteer at the MTA transit museum.

Last year McCollum was arrested for stealing a Greyhound bus and driving passengers, on time, to their scheduled destination. He is now facing up to 15 years, having already spent more than half of his adult life in prison. No matter how often McCollum is denied his identity as a public transit worker, he insists on it. He insists on his own belonging, unauthorized. He does not deny the facts, but he refuses the system's refusal of himself. He returns to the subway again and again as if to say "I am a part of you." And he is. He is actually *not* impersonating anyone.

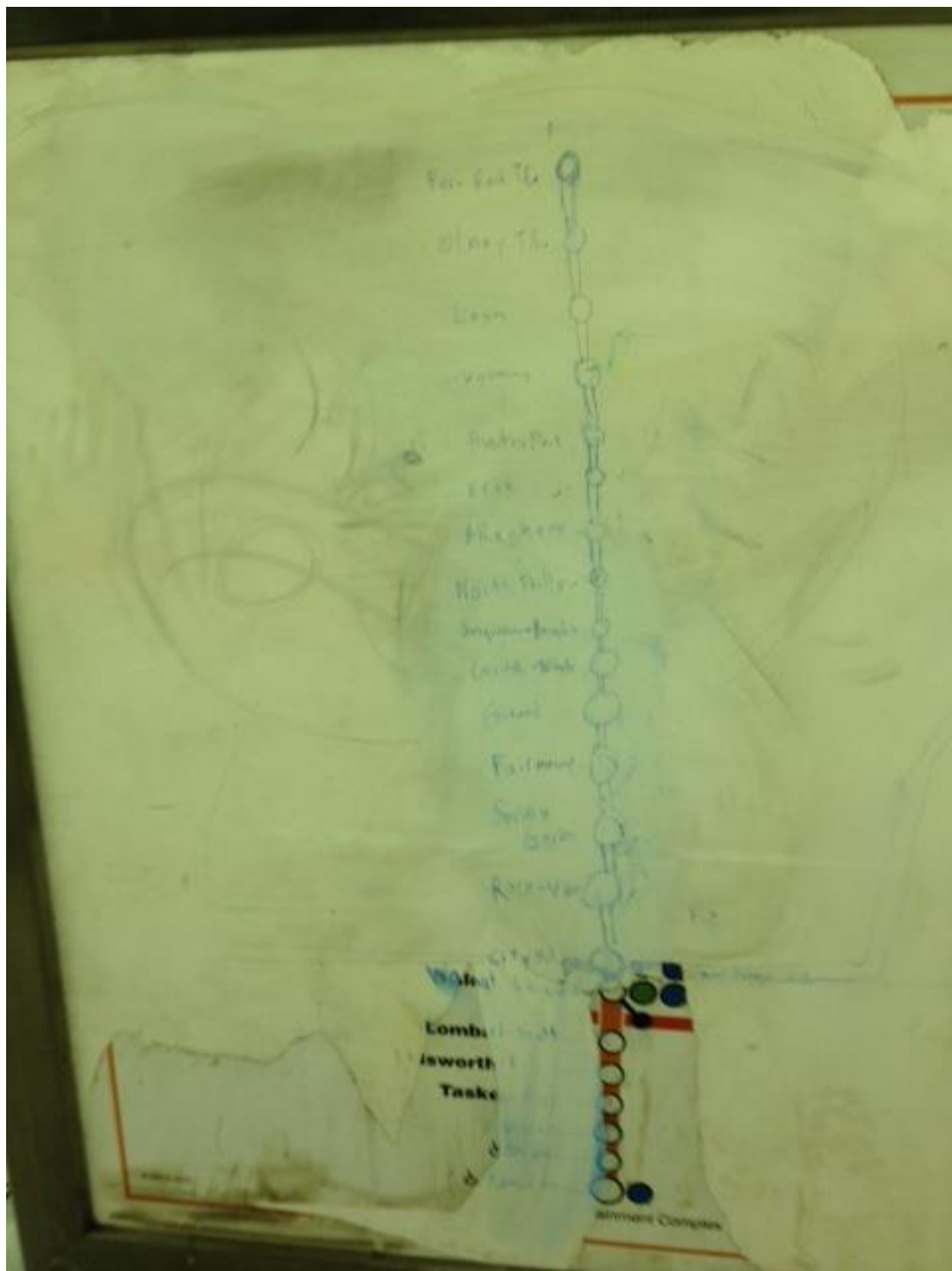
The administrators of the city create a phantom and expect you to live in it. They expect you to become the phantom.

In high school, I loved escaping high school. Who didn't? Who doesn't? I loved riding the el downtown from Frankford, the motion pictures out the window, the old parks, factories and rooftops, the graffiti and feeling of racing through the city you were part of, unfolding with it—this was the feeling of leaving behind the prison of school, which was someone else's fantasy. The sudden swerve along I-95 and the slide underground at the Ben Franklin Bridge. I'd get off at 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and head down to South Street with my friends, looking for bootleg tapes of Nirvana and Pearl Jam shows. A store called CDs To Go let us listen on headphones to check the quality before we coughed up ten bucks for a recording on a blank tape. Then we'd make copies for each other, bring them back to school.

But that feeling on the el, which was a satisfaction of the need for movement, was a feeling of becoming something else, and that need to become something else is the need for public space, the need for *a public*, period. And I want to say that this need, which is also the need for collective power, unauthorized, is the only thing that can save us.

At the end of the phantom line, in Roxborough, retired cops get off I-76, stop at the supermarket for trash bags, drive home and park their private cars and walk their little dogs. They pick up their dogs' shit, cursing under their breath. They stay in school, as they always have, and they will die in school. Let them.





Replace the  
Lawn map  
or let  
it be.

Don't butt  
it keep  
it blank

### **III strikes**

## map

replace the damn map  
or let it be  
don't buff and keep it  
blank  
don't say love and be  
there in spirit  
don't ask how  
my spirit is  
if you got here  
thru a suburb  
officer  
you were conceived  
in this same lot  
the king of jeans pulled  
down his jeans and  
it was your mouth  
on the condo  
replace the damn map  
or let it be  
don't buff and keep it  
blank  
i saved your life  
and you gave me a six-pack  
your life is worth a six-pack  
to form is to empty  
the vent's lashes  
are dogs running  
i love you  
for all time  
the harmonica's  
in my pocket  
it plays heart of gold  
the dream is at work  
we get off together  
replace the damn map  
or let it be  
don't buff and keep it  
blank  
if fast food is public space  
stay warm in wendy's  
be a stranger  
the stranger the weather the better  
the small talk  
a little history  
a little ancient been-around

and biggie fry  
you feel ancient  
the ancient's been around  
replace the damn map  
or let it be  
don't buff and keep it  
blank  
sit down  
be a frosty  
and sunny's the runniest dated feeling as  
a weekend should be a long fuck sprawl  
into other histories of meaning it  
replace the damn map  
or let it be  
don't buff and keep it  
blank  
don't say love and be  
there in spirit  
don't dig up my street  
get bored  
and leave  
turn the water back on  
please  
or the water will turn itself  
the fuck back on  
like i turn myself  
the fuck back on  
every day

## **dumper guard**

to escape the great depression  
people built roads  
w/out a plan  
my road is here  
their road is there  
you can guess  
the state fish  
slowly a letter  
a day  
the heart wants what  
the car left  
music  
parked  
in a train graveyard  
in a forest  
in north carolina  
the shadow of an abandoned  
staircase makes  
public sense to  
fuck under  
hard work, scam  
of life  
back at you  
four a.m.  
dumper guard pours  
money into milk cans  
for septa  
and his kids  
jersey goes back  
to jersey  
and breaks off  
into the ocean

### **secret service**

you're telling me dolphins  
aren't building cities  
and killing everything  
because they don't have hands  
okay  
the pope is in a jeep  
w/ fins  
waving to the dolphins  
*what's amore?*  
says a dolphin in a pope  
t-shirt  
smoking in the sea  
i got this at a thrift store  
in kentucky  
on a road trip  
it was raining  
do you like it  
do you like me  
do you wanna strangle the sea  
w/ these fins and rain and t-shirt  
and everyone you've ever loved  
and look  
no hands  
no hands

## **honk if you don't exist**

a strike is people  
the horse a door  
you were saying  
tempus fuck it  
we made your car  
it's an eraser  
get in  
sit, unknown, sit  
honk  
if you don't exist  
you were saying  
how to be anything  
when everything's  
exhaust  
a parade of geese  
has shut down  
traffic in front  
of the art museum  
nobody honks  
the traffic is thinking  
about itself  
its itness  
my armpits  
stink  
my girlfriend  
loves it  
we're late  
to a job  
called food  
the geese tease  
the streets  
the museum starts  
jerking off  
a cop shakes  
his head  
the steps collapse  
into rain  
rocky is now a girl  
the flood hires us  
to be water  
our mouth  
grabs the statue  
of frank rizzo  
by the ankles  
he waves  
goodbye



like a dead trophy  
to his wife the cops  
she was born cops  
every day  
a blue life  
comes out of its  
blue mom  
a smurf w/ a gun  
there's another one  
mattering  
like a sandwich  
on a playground  
*marry me*, he says, *marry me*  
before drowning

## **christening**

tired of songs  
you show up in a true story  
like a fist  
the corner needs  
& the corner needs  
a new stop sign  
so the city  
which is two hired men  
comes to change it  
& in that bare minute  
they retire the old  
sign to their truck  
a little dog comes along  
& takes a quick piss  
on the new one  
right where it says  
ALL WAY  
and trots off

## **may day**

what is may day  
    bail paid in limes  
behind wal-mart  
the cat colony  
jukes broken tracks  
    apples  
    hearts  
    rolling in mud  
small wolves  
in chernobyl  
woven awake  
in marsh  
    lush green  
their crib an old  
potato cellar  
their mother looks out  
of your house  
    what is change  
    what is change  
without erasing yourself  
    what will i eat  
i will eat from your hands  
where villages once stood  
i will eat from the ground  
your bison's last breath  
i will trace the cold earth  
i will trace the cold earth

## **dirty martini**

it's like drinking the ocean  
w/out choking  
if life ended now  
it's just time  
ask me how  
the whole city's doing  
edgar allan poe is fine  
in moyamensing prison  
they love him  
in the deli corner  
of acme, muttering  
provolone til the parking  
lot is buried in snow  
you can dig your car out  
next week  
here's a pack of tokens  
and some scratch-offs  
if you were born after  
this day in 1912  
you can bring the lovers  
back together  
one's walking into ray's  
one's walking home right  
now, probably a different  
lorraine than the one  
you know but all motion  
*is* a crab, snockey's closed  
and stays open  
in my heart  
which is late  
to the tongue—take  
my tongue and paint  
their doors before  
they're home, paint  
their steps like  
the bruises  
you return to  
as if employed  
by orange peels  
to the curb  
you owe nothing  
to the taste of  
the weight  
of desire, the city flattened  
by rent as the rent dies  
for our sins and the roads

bleed out

## hold your horses

route 45 please  
board at fire hydrant  
under the shitty little birds  
this must be you  
coming from somewhere  
how long's it been  
since you named a thing  
after a general  
this pile of croutons  
general croutons  
we have passed the jetsons  
and look, don't trip  
the magic is not  
olfactory  
it's not my riff  
you're smelling  
it's the church of itch  
got your tongue  
between wires  
there's a bite inside faith  
like going to jury duty  
we must repent  
we must think again  
like a pensive motherfucker  
*penser*, i say  
order in english  
your big shit sandwich  
for the neon coplover  
in search of guitar  
the shape of sound  
blows horse shoes  
in our direction  
don't mind the cobble stone  
don't mind the smoky job rot  
pave over the track  
all you want  
the prison won't come back  
you gotta drive around it  
you gotta drive around it  
to see the heart balloon  
float across the rooftops  
and disappear toward  
the delaware

## kazoo

cops in the apple store  
working for “the city”  
like you have to stay here  
and be the place  
no poem  
so all mayors  
must hang  
as real ornaments  
done to you  
from trees parks  
chalked up  
all bodies make  
a case for bracing  
yourself, the city’s lights  
settle in your girl’s  
face who are fugitives  
to grow us past mere  
poetics  
i am an ancestor too  
who meant by “permanence”  
(like a car)  
food, shelter and sex  
while performing abandonment  
which is a door  
in a cloud—open it  
for the noose  
made of bill gates  
and watch bill move his mouth  
over the toilet  
40 public schools  
into  
one  
your  
assignment: write  
an essay in which you crawl  
toward subjectivity  
as flat tires  
gallop thru the wheezing  
infrastructure

## Spring Course Assignments

On Thu, Oct 1, 2015 at 7:52 PM, RYAN M. ECKES <[eckes@temple.edu](mailto:eckes@temple.edu)> wrote:

Hi Larry,

I just learned from Rachael Groner's email to FYWP about Spring course assignments that you're assigning courses in creative writing and literature for next semester. Is there a new availability form to fill out? I'd like to teach a course in the Spring.

Thanks,  
Ryan

\*

On Fri, Oct 2, 2015 at 7:08 AM, LAWRENCE VENUTI <[lvenuti@temple.edu](mailto:lvenuti@temple.edu)> wrote:

Dear Ryan,

All spring courses have been staffed. If you send me your c.v., I'll keep it on file in case anything becomes available.

Yours,  
Larry

\*

On Fri, Oct 2, 2015 at 1:15 PM, RYAN M. ECKES <[eckes@temple.edu](mailto:eckes@temple.edu)> wrote:

Larry,

I've been teaching here for 10 years. Every semester I've taught here the English Department has sent course request forms to adjunct professors to fill out for the following semester. Can you tell me why I wasn't invited to teach a course next semester?

Thanks,  
Ryan

\*

On Fri, Oct 2, 2015 at 1:23 PM, LAWRENCE VENUTI <[lvenuti@temple.edu](mailto:lvenuti@temple.edu)> wrote:

I'm sorry you feel singled out, Ryan. There were fewer courses to staff.

If you send me a c.v., again, I'll keep it on file.

\*

On Fri, Oct 2, 2015 at 9:32 PM, RYAN M. ECKES <[eckes@temple.edu](mailto:eckes@temple.edu)> wrote:

Larry,



My C.V., credentials, syllabi and evaluations should be on file. I've taught here for the last ten years.

Will you explain to me why you did not send out course request forms to English adjunct faculty for next semester? I am asking because this has been done for at least the last 20 semesters, and I was not notified of any change in procedure.

Also, it's odd that you used the term "singled out" in your email because being singled out hadn't occurred to me.

Ryan

\*

On Fri, Oct 2, 2015 at 9:41 PM, LAWRENCE VENUTI <[lvenuti@temple.edu](mailto:lvenuti@temple.edu)> wrote:

You yourself implied that you were singled out, Ryan, because I had not contacted you personally. You wanted to know "why [you weren't] invited to teach a course next semester." That means that you were expecting a personal invitation.

I don't plan to send out course request forms to adjuncts. The volume of courses is too variable to satisfy all the requests that would come in.

The department keeps no file of c.v.s for adjuncts. I would like to maintain one. If you would like to send me yours, I'll include it.

\*

On Tue, Oct 6, 2015 at 1:17 PM, RYAN M. ECKES <[eckes@temple.edu](mailto:eckes@temple.edu)> wrote:

Larry,

On what basis have you chosen to not offer me a course for the Spring?

Ryan

\*

On Tue, Oct 6, 2015 at 1:20 PM, LAWRENCE VENUTI <[lvenuti@temple.edu](mailto:lvenuti@temple.edu)> wrote:

Dear Ryan,

Your messages to me have been filled with complaints. If you feel that you have grounds for complaint, please take up the matter with the department chair, Philip Yannella.

Yours,  
Larry

Dear Adjunct Faculty:

Several adjunct faculty have recently

built

a union

your individual rights

your salary

job security

benefits

cannot

cannot

change

without

the union

without

taking

my office

Sincerely,

Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Temple University

## bad form

99.9 percent of people eat their own god  
but there's no word for it  
because you keep checking your phone  
how long have you worked  
in this blue  
who makes the decisions  
in your blue  
how much does the blue pay  
why does your coke taste like  
blood  
what disrupts the illusion  
if not the word "illusion"  
which lulls us to sleep  
it's all a bag of flowers  
i grab a flower and brush the present  
off my teeth  
hillary clinton wants to be president  
today  
what are *you* going to do  
you can't recall a knockoff  
it's just a knockoff  
in the united states of knockoff  
you lost me at "i was born in . . ."  
the block was blocked off  
the cop said "i knew your dad back when"  
and quoted us most of the collected everyone  
"slavery is necessary," he said, "that's why  
i'm voting for hillary"  
then wiped his ass w/ a cat  
and threw it at us  
that's the god of life  
just like you  
on may day working  
for the national poem  
called "isolated consciousness looks at a tree"  
at 6pm i went to lucky 13  
drank nine blue coats  
put a five on the bar  
and walked out  
bad form  
bad form  
gina had my back  
paid the tab  
said read "a broken world"  
by joseph lease  
an elegy for a friend

the opposite of a scab  
in trust of death  
a blackout is a small strike  
don't make me make  
meaning  
don't make me walk out  
the blue  
of all time  
after eating love  
i will eat love again  
my skin will be water  
as yours  
faith in rain  
as rain and rain  
as more than  
love  
don't make me  
make words  
for a solidarity  
that works  
so we all show up  
as the tree yawning  
down the isolated consciousness  
of ernest hemingway  
his knockoff armies  
who will fight  
for the wounded hero  
in a pool of everyone else's blood  
waving a flag of dicks  
until the box office explodes  
and all is profile pic  
"what's on your mind?"  
not you  
and not you  
and not you  
and nothing  
a bag of flowers  
a block of us  
talking to a hole  
in the sky  
the sky is scratched  
nothing's crossed out  
the cd plays  
disparate youth  
it skips  
it's still good w/ the skips

## **memo for labor**

you cannot separate the job from the house from the rent from  
the earth from the food from the healthcare from the water from  
the transit from the war from the schools from the prisons from  
the war from the water from the house from the healthcare from  
the war from the transit from the schools from the food from the  
job from the prisons from the rent from the earth

## elevator no love

dear internet  
world of non-action  
goodbye  
we're free  
the temple's in the toilet  
my keys are on the table  
nobody's rich  
and patter  
in the dark  
empty seats  
thank god  
we're a flea in a ferris wheel  
we put a cap on the pomp  
like a boss  
made of water  
here you cannot *teach*  
*for america*  
you will not cut out  
your eyes  
you will not cut off  
your ears  
and hang your balls  
from the wire  
for a name you can't feed  
enough  
there is no name  
there is no *israel*  
god is a football  
roofed in the gutter  
forever  
a boy screams after it  
until he is the scream  
my gums bleed  
in the morning  
for new work  
to circle the drain  
"you" as no as loved  
to the bottom  
throws rocks at dead goalies  
each rock a no  
as the sky bruised into  
question  
no as the moon  
if you wanna live  
stop saying "sky"  
and pick up a rock

and look at it

## aida

*i feel like i've died*  
*feel like i've died*  
*& gone to regular life*  
ray sings  
on the tape deck  
of aida's car  
which is my car  
aida was my grandmother  
the tape plays over & over  
it's a 97 toyota camry  
aida bought for driving  
to acme & dollar tree  
once a week to use coupons  
she clipped from the papers  
watching tv w/ her cat  
squirrels at her window  
looking in  
the reader wanting more  
but finished crosswords  
cigarettes, tissues & phlegm  
acme & dollar tree  
ray sings in aida's car  
it's still aida's car  
she was hard to get close to  
the faint trace of her smoke  
is now ray's sober voice  
it warms me up  
the tape is called *guts*  
the band is called window kits  
the song is called "whut yrmadeof"  
ray isn't sure  
he wonders aloud  
he sings *these days i don't just let*  
*any old wind blow in*  
goddamn it, edie, i sing  
in philip's voice  
to ray's music  
philip was my grandfather  
he called his wife edie  
the tape plays over & over  
i drive thru new jersey  
on house visits  
i get one adjunct to sign  
an authorization card  
UNION YES  
we want better pay



we want healthcare  
we want a voice  
in regular life  
hey, how are you  
it's regular life  
good pay, job security  
& healthcare  
no reason to move  
ever again  
i will live in this house  
for 60 years  
& clip coupons  
for my cat  
it's a 97 toyota camry  
beige or something  
faint trace of window  
kits thru new jersey  
my guardian angel  
in the ashtray  
cigarette burns  
on the door  
heaven is a place  
where nothing ever happens  
imagine if we threw out  
the scumbags who run  
our schools  
imagine if WE ran the schools  
yeah  
what then  
right  
yeah  
sounds good  
power in numbers  
see you later  
*and i'm still writing songs about ghosts*  
ray sings  
ray's still sad  
i give a eulogy for aida again  
because no one else will  
they're too afraid  
their histories too fraught  
too painful but for me  
she was distant enough  
i can make everyone  
happy w/ a mild honesty  
about her 97 years  
of life  
so listen

she helped me one time  
w/ a paper on the great  
depression in middle school  
there was a detail  
about rumble-seating  
on broad street  
a detail she repeated over & over  
until crystallized  
aida laughing down broad street  
thru hard times  
that's who she was, people  
this fierce wild-at-heart woman  
who loved to travel & explore  
& play by her own rules  
tough as anything  
that's right  
no words  
on the way  
she treated her children  
nothing on why  
they can't speak  
at her funeral  
in regular life  
goddamn it, edie  
stop telling us how to live  
the war is over  
you won  
the poem is in my back  
like a knot  
the pain is returning  
as a ripple  
the job's no longer  
fulfilling  
what is regular life  
why do you believe in it  
another week  
a slab of meat  
slapped on top  
some cheese  
sixty hours of regular life  
that's a freedom sandwich  
a sandwich for freedom  
imagine the pleasure of biting  
into permanent holiday  
which is why i've worked  
so hard  
& my father  
& my grandfather

& my mother  
& my grandmother  
& everyone's grandmother  
saving up what they can  
for the boxes  
they'll never own  
which hide the ripples  
one life to another  
a union  
a sea  
a city  
of body as ripple  
*in* another  
& *of* another  
& no eulogy  
no coupon  
for your grave  
but the whole story as city openly  
made together  
over & over  
i think of anna  
how are you  
right now  
other side of the river  
doing the same thing  
cars pass  
people don't answer  
i pretend you're next to me  
we talk about ripples  
all kinds  
we theorize it  
til you laugh & say no  
w/ your lips  
which i trace w/ my finger  
for weeks  
it's my dream  
it's watery  
i stare at the ocean  
on my wall  
it's night  
& seagulls squawk by  
in the sky outside  
for what  
just passing thru  
it's winter  
a line of glue  
streak of sense  
spine in dream

on my way  
to this job of loving  
outside a box  
i wanna say something  
like *we've been cultured out of the primordial*  
*now sign this card, okay*  
but that won't work  
ask saul alinksy  
ask anybody  
this union  
what is it  
what is it  
really  
is it desire  
clumsy  
sloppy  
desire  
what i want  
from you  
is what i want  
for you  
my heart  
which is nothing  
but all my  
wanting  
for all that radiates  
care &  
pleasure &  
hunger for knowing unfolding &  
pulsing &  
coming  
in spite of the shoulder-  
stooping fear that radiates  
from shards of dead intimacy  
& violence along my spine  
the dotted lines of the road  
no after no after no  
echo from those dim hallways  
of those dull buildings  
we spent all those years in  
trying to speak  
all the muted tv's  
of the world  
still  
*anything can happen, you said*  
in the bar  
in the glow  
to my face

*no one's going anywhere*  
it's true  
even parallel parking can  
be the sexiest  
thing  
push your ass  
against the bumper  
hop the curb  
grab my head  
cut the wheel  
say what you want  
down my tight  
street  
straddled & pulsing  
i just slide right in  
*so serious*, you say,  
*so serious*  
as regular life begins  
to disappear  
we wake up  
our union keeps  
winning  
harder & harder  
we joke  
it's the slogan  
we like it  
we want it  
on a t-shirt  
we want it  
turned inside-out  
tossed to the floor  
over & over  
a ball rolls  
down the street  
so kick it  
to be alive  
in other ways  
how my body  
aches  
for what we can't yet be  
how your name  
when i see it  
burns  
how your smell  
how your ache  
how your lips  
how your hurt  
when you hurt

is mine  
how your hurt  
when i hurt  
is this  
how the hurt  
when it hurts  
is ours

## **baptism**

a factory makes facts  
you show up  
then you're gone  
red clouds eat  
the snow  
inside me  
like a footprint  
june is purple  
drums are rooms  
for infinite need  
the lungs walk out  
in four decades  
52% of wildlife gone  
where to park  
that stone whale  
in a moon of notes  
i get by  
like the news  
under hums  
in the shape of a squirrel  
a man may form  
and fall from a tree  
an apple  
flashing the sky  
between our huts  
fish teeth  
are a secret  
baptized  
w/out a bus  
to splash into  
your eye in the skull  
of a penguin  
clocks out the city  
like a dad who sighs  
up the stairs  
gray whirl of traffic  
underlining the past  
it's all for us  
minus the job clown  
on your shoulder

## Same Time

In cold war school, fourth grade, we had “current events.” We performed newscasts in class, took turns reporting what we’d found at home from the newspaper. And then, I guess, we talked about it. Today we do this as adults on facebook and twitter.

-

There was a massive strike in India last Friday. The fact squeaked through all the plutocratic noise, a blip I’ve clung to as infinite. Would you tell me about it?

-

Indiana Jones, tumbleweed, rolls down the street, totally whole. Don’t look back, Mr. Jones. Take all the Dr. Phils with you, turn down a side street and I will meet you there with open trash bag.

-

“The universe will never happen,” says Heriberto Yépez. I love the closure as how many millions open other books the same time I close mine.

-

When I hear “universe” I think “union.” I scrape the bottom of a jar with my spoon, a dry tongue.

-

It’s not what I’m missing that hurts, but this endless need to become something else against mass expression of collective powerlessness.

-

Enough, clearly, is not enough.

-

the pears are the pears  
the table is the table  
the house is the house  
the windows are the windows

the car is the car  
the roads are the roads  
the streets are the streets  
the white line is the white line



the curves are the curves  
the thigh is the thigh  
the knee is the knee  
the arms are the arms

the eyes are the eyes  
the mouth is the mouth

-

Ted Greenwald said that. It got me here, the poem, dropped me off, hey thanks for the ride.

-

The mouth is a way out  
The moon is a fat dime  
Exact change only

-

I was there in the painting with the gulls on the rock. We wrote our names on the rock to be there with each other.

-

“Common” means moving + changing together.

-

“I miss your angry heart,” you text from across the country, working.  
“I miss your angry heart,” I text back, working.

-

“We cobbled it together,” I said about another relationship. When I talk about my working life, I say  
“I’ve cobbled it together.”

-

Our lives paved by gigs, the news evaporates quickly. The ground is shaky. Shaky quickly, we heart our friends’ transmissions. Do these tiny solidarities add up?

-

There’s no such thing as a “gig” economy. It’s a scab economy, long been, sustained by capitalist government.

-

I like it when all my friends post pictures of the sunset at the same time.

-

Will we find a way to throw our cobbles at the right people at the same time?

-

During the Q&A of a recent poetry reading, older poets started talking about dodge ball as if it were a game that younger poets had never played, as if the game were extinct.

-

“Common” means moving + changing together.

-

When I was a kid we played a game in the schoolyard called “suey”—short for suicide, I learned later—in which we pegged the shit out of each other with a tennis ball. The more you dropped the ball, the more you got pegged.

-

Gus, the Pennsylvania lottery groundhog, says “Keep on scratchin!”

-

If you see your own shadow, it means love as refusal. It means love as refusal so you can drag your sorry ass out of bed in the morning.

-

“Common” means moving + changing together.

-

We organized our shadows into love as refusal, and the day followed. We dodged the boss and laughed towards a plan.

-

Imagine being more than affect in a time of mic drops.

-

Is this thing on?

-

Let's sit down and watch our pay go up.

## **burnt turf**

record is mint  
12.99  
it's yours, somebody  
in nebraska loves you  
"the flower's always  
in the almond", evaporates  
steamboat willie on my street  
w/ xylophone teeth  
there's infinite parking  
put eyelashes on your car  
and spit  
i like that  
ungentrified wink  
unknotting my back  
like an old lover  
in that faded way  
it's contagious  
the echo  
of shadow  
coming off you  
in sheets, hips  
pulled against me  
in waves  
of houses  
lie down w/ the ghost  
wake up w/ the ghost  
i was dead for a long time  
but look, sunday, my clothes  
on the radiator are dry  
and my heart is public, ripe  
for the cellar that goes on  
and on so we can keep chasing  
ourselves into the ground  
in all directions twentieth  
centuries, how these rotting  
bridges can hold up train after  
train of coal and death, steel  
veins rusting out of concrete  
each train a need to keep  
pushing outward  
you hear it at night  
in the wind  
three whistles  
basic desire  
the bouncing ball  
keeping time

you can squeeze the benjamin franklin  
house between two parking meters  
and feed the art world for two seconds  
and pretend the end of history  
falling asleep convinced  
that love is whatever can speak  
for the emptiness and scribble it  
down for permanence  
and fall asleep again, trains  
for some, cars for others  
general motors for all  
our grinding teeth and  
wal-mart in the back  
in the morning  
no strike but  
a loose dream  
of a circulation  
that equals solidarity  
instead of these neighborhoods  
bumbling w/ little yuppie kids  
in halloween costumes  
they are balloons  
we must pop  
open your books, children, to chapter  
1: *letting go of status*  
a motorcycle farts off the car alarms  
and laughter becomes us, the street, vein of  
endless transfer we celebrate  
no state but the seed within  
chapter 2: *sell the moon for a seven-minute*  
*cartoon called "fuck the boss"*  
which will grow roots  
that tunnel out a vast  
subway system so people  
can get to pleasure  
on time in every part  
of town—this is my plan  
for the city  
it already happened  
it's called "burnt turf"  
record is mint  
the cars pulled us  
all apart finally  
we stopped stumbling  
out of work  
and built new bridges  
from the corpses  
of meter maids

i mean millionaires  
and walked them  
and walked them again  
a million here, a million there  
burnt turf  
record is mint  
i woke up in the backseat  
of a car  
crossing grays ferry  
it was my dead grandmother  
don't worry, she said  
tossed her cigarette out the window  
it's the future, she said, broke means  
together now  
and drove on in silence  
for a long time  
i stared out the window  
we were there  
and love ceased to be an escape

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